The Nightingale Tracker:
Communication Technology for Community Health Education

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Nurse educators are increasingly seeking sites in the community for their students' clinical educational experiences. Because students frequently travel to clinics and clients' homes at multiple distant sites, nurse educators are concerned about how to maintain communication with their students. For these reasons FITNE, Inc., (formerly the Fuld Institute for Technology in Nursing Education) decided to explore how information technology could assist nurse educators to supervise their clinical students better.

FITNE is developing a computerized information system called the "Nightingale Tracker," which will be used by students and instructors/preceptors to manage clinical communication. Tracker communication functions include real time voice, data, and image messaging between students and instructors during a client visit and electronic information processing related to the community clinical assignment. Tracker features include custom software to help students plan, deliver, and evaluate nursing care. Because the Tracker will be used for long-distance clinical communication, a standardized clinical vocabulary, the Omaha System is also featured. Communications about the clinical assignments follow a sequence of:

1. Students receive a client assignment from their instructors via electronic communication.

2. Students electronically create a previsit care plan by using a computerized form of the Omaha System.

3. Students use the computerized version of the Omaha System combined with the Tracker messaging system (i.e., cellular phone links, e-mail, and facsimiles) to communicate clinical encounter data with their instructors.

4. Students document the client visit by using Omaha System vocabulary and transfer the data electronically to their clients' charts.

5. Instructors/supervisors retrieve clinical data (organized according to the Omaha System) from the database created by the Tracker for use in research, student evaluations, and resource planning.

This electronic poster will demonstrate a working version of the Nightingale Tracker by:

1. Sending and receiving simulated clinical information using the system's distance communication features.

2. Documenting a simulated patient visit using the system's information management software.

Results from a Nightingale Tracker user pilot test, conducted in 1996, will also be described.

As community-focused services continue to grow, nurses will need to explore new ways to meet expanding clinical communication needs. Information technology holds promise in helping community nurses better meet clients' needs and will allow these nurses to take a leadership role in the health care decisions of tomorrow.